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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

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Key stories in the media:

All media reported that during his visit to the region Wednesday British PM Tony Blair called for the cessation of Palestinian terrorism as a paramount need for the renewal of the peace process, and the provision by Israel of a diplomatic horizon. The media reported that Blair nodded briefly toward Yasser Arafat's tomb in what Palestinian officials said was a compromise gesture agreed upon at the last minute.

Leading media reported that IDF troops killed three Palestinians in the Khan Yunis refugee camp Wednesday, and that the IDF later left the city. Israel Radio reported that this morning dozens of mortar shells were launched at Gaza Strip settlements. All media reported that Palestinian gunmen killed an Israeli Bedouin who was guarding bulldozers near a planned section of the security fence in the southern Hebron hills. Israel Radio reported that the police are close to solving the crime. Leading media reported that the IDF has recently arrested a Palestinian couple, East Jerusalem residents, who planned to carry out a double suicide bombing at the Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem where 15 Israelis were killed in an August 2001 attack.

Ha'aretz reported that most residents of the Pe'at Sadeh settlement, in the Gaza Strip bloc of Gush Katif, have reached an agreement in principle with the Disengagement Administration for a collective move to Moshav Mavki'im, south of Ashkelon, should disengagement go ahead. Nigel Roberts, the World Bank's country director for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post that Israel is willing to consider the possibility of letting a third party take over at Gaza Strip naval and aerial ports after the disengagement plan is carried out.

Israel Radio reported that Canada will send observers to the PA in the January 9 elections. The station cited assessments that 600 foreign monitors will supervise the elections. The media reported on the first local elections in the territories since 1976, which are being held today. Jerusalem Post notes that Hamas-affiliated movements are presenting female candidates. Jerusalem Post reported that Wednesday Israel handed over security control in Bethlehem to the Palestinians until January 19, ahead of Christmas celebrations in the city. Israel Radio reported that PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) will attend the Midnight Mass in the Nativity Church.

Israel Radio quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying that he will not tolerate any attempt to stimulate sedition in the army. Leading media reported that Wednesday former National Religious Party leader MK Effi Eitam called on settlers not to don orange Stars of David. The media also cited an announcement by Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories Wednesday that it has decided to oppose the use of force, the wearing of orange Stars of David, and the call to refuse among soldiers in the struggle against the disengagement plan. Maariv and Israel Radio reported that right-wing 12 Knesset members have signed a pledge to be there for settlers on the day of

their possible evacuation. Yediot reported that hundreds of Lubavicher Hassids from New York are planning to come to Israel on an airlift, with the goal of bodily preventing the evacuation of Gush Katif.

Jerusalem Post quoted Rabbi Yosef Alnekave, head of the Gush Katif Religious Council, as warning Wednesday on the right-wing radio Arutz Sheva (Arutz-7) that some settlers may begin manufacturing homemade bombs to fire at Palestinians unless the IDF succeeds in stopping the barrage of mortar shells fired daily at Gaza Strip settlements.

In a paid ad in Ha'aretz, Peace Now calls on Israelis to sign a pledge to volunteer to replace any soldier who will refuse to evacuate settlers.

Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Radio and Israel Radio reported that, "Syrian-Turkey ties warmed up," as the PMs of the two countries signed a free-trade agreement in Damascus on Wednesday. The media reported that Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered to broker Syrian-Israeli talks. Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that, in an unprecedented transaction, Druze farmers in the Golan have received permission from Minister Mofaz to sell 15,000 tons of apples to Syria.

Jerusalem Post reported that Wednesday, calling the number of anti-Israel resolutions in the UN "ridiculous," Dutch Ambassador to Israel Bob Hensch told reporters that the EU was committed to reducing those numbers.

Extensively citing a Bloomberg article, Yediot details the assets the late PA chairman Yasser Arafat held around the world: USD 545 million in communication ventures in Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia, and USD 6.6 million in business enterprises in the U.S. (two software companies and a New York bowling alley). Ha'aretz quoted political sources within the U.S. Democratic Party as saying that Sen. John Kerry (Mass.) will be visiting Israel and the PA early next month, as part of a larger Middle East tour. The newspaper quoted Kerry's press secretary April Boyd as saying: "The Senator's main goal will be to visit Iraq and thank U.S. troops and troops from Massachusetts," adding that Middle East peace is high on his agenda.

Leading media reported that Iran announced Wednesday that its security services have arrested 10 persons suspected of revealing information regarding its nuclear program to the U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies. Maariv quoted Gen Mohammad Salimi, Iran's top army commander, as saying Wednesday that his country's military is on standby in case of an attack against its nuclear facilities.

Yediot quoted Foreign Ministry D-G Ron Prosor as saying at the Herzliya Conference a few days ago that Israel's decision-making process is distorted because of the army's excessive influence on the political echelon.

Citing Bloomberg, Jerusalem Post quoted Sudanese State Minister at the Interior Ministry Mohamed Ahmed Haroun as saying Wednesday in Khartoum that Israel is arming the rebels in Sudan' western province of Darfur.

Jerusalem Post quoted visiting Harvard University President Larry Summers, a former U.S. secretary of the treasury, as saying Wednesday that demonization of Israel and anti-Semitic tension on American campuses has lessened considerably and that the divestment movement has dissipated.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 23): "[Abu Mazen] already knows what everyone will know once he is elected: he cannot deliver the goods."

Regional affairs writer Arnon Regular opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Palestinians [understand] that the real focal point of decision is not in London, and that the person who will determine Abu Mazen's future ahead of permanent-status agreements is not Blair, but Bush."

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Blair, to

his credit, was consistent in his message: Iraq's new rules need to apply here as well."

Liberal op-ed writer Yael Paz-Melamed commented in popular, pluralist Maariv: "More than two-thirds of the [Israeli] public supports evacuating settlements for peace, even unilaterally. But [the settlers] don't care about that. The concept of 'majority' is a democratic concept."

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz: "If the settlers decide to respond like the citizenry of the Ukraine ... no government can prevail over them."

Block Quotes:

I. "Abu Mazen's Candies"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 23): "[Abu Mazen] already knows what everyone will know once he is elected: he cannot deliver the goods. Abu Mazen planned to reach an agreement with the various Palestinian factions about a cease-fire, even a temporary one -- something between a cursory hudna [truce] and a fragile pledge of honor -- so as to allow him to begin negotiations from a position of personal power, and as someone capable of serving as a source of authority.... The answer he received from the Hamas representatives both in Damascus and in the territories was an unqualified no.... It is clear to all that [Hamas's] conditions are unacceptable, and their only purpose is to embarrass Abu Mazen and to cast him as impotent.... It is clear to Hamas that a resumption of terror attacks will embarrass Abu Mazen even before the elections, and that those terror attacks could have an immediate strategic impact. As such, the chances of Abu Mazen successfully achieving a comprehensive Palestinian cease-fire agreement are slim. Israel, which had hoped for a successful and coordinated withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, for good will gestures, for opening the seaport and many other things, could find itself facing disengagement under fire, irrespective of the Palestinian Authority, which could go back to being irrelevant. Given the current development of circumstances, that ought to be the IDF's working assumption as it prepares for disengagement, and not any of those optimistic assumptions about 'windows of opportunity,' that have been reported by senior cabinet ministers."

II. "The Palestinians Understand that the Landlord Lives in Washington"

Regional affairs writer Arnon Regular opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 23): "Even after Blair's visit, the Palestinians have no tangible calendar for the road map. It is obvious to them that the Palestinian state will not be established during 2005, and they harbor no expectations about Blair's summit conferences. Contrary to the way British officials have presented the London conference, the Palestinians would be hard-pressed to describe it as anything beyond a 'meeting'.... More than once during the last year of Arafat's life, the Palestinian Authority has described the British policy as the 'continuation of the Balfour Declaration' -- an Israeli-British plot behind the Palestinians' back. During Arafat's life the Palestinians understood -- and continue to do so now -- that the real focal point of decision is not in London, and that the person who will determine Abu Mazen's future ahead of permanent-status agreements is not Blair, but Bush."

III. "How Iraq Changed Tony Blair"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (December 23): "Blair's brief trip to Iraq [on the day of the lethal attack against U.S. troops in Mosul] left its impact. Just how great an impact was apparent well beyond Blair's condolences. It was apparent in his unequivocal words about fighting terrorism and creating democracy, and in his comments about the diplomatic process here.... Israel's eventual embrace of the conference [promoted by Blair], even though it will not attend, was the result of assurances that the meeting will not deal with the peace process, but only with Palestinian reform, and also assurances that Blair -- during his visit to Israel -- would speak out forcefully against terrorism. Blair lived up to his side of the bargain.... Blair, while in Iraq, framed the current fight there as 'very clearly a battle

between democracy and terror.' It's obvious that you can't say that in Baghdad one day, and say something completely different in Jerusalem the next. Blair, to his credit, was consistent in his message: Iraq's new rules need to apply here as well. The new rules also apply in respect to the viability of the Palestinian state. Blair charted new ground for a European leader by intimating that a Palestinian state is not an end in and of itself, and that its viability goes beyond the usual catch-phrases of territorial contiguity and economic independence."

IV. "The Mask is Torn"

Liberal op-ed writer Yael Paz-Melamed commented in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 23): "That's it. The mask has been torn off.... An enormous chasm -- a chasm of culture, of values -- yawns between a majority of the Israeli public and the settlers. The talk about a majority of the Israeli public is based on repeated public opinion polls that establish that more than two-thirds of the public supports evacuating settlements for peace, even unilaterally. But they don't care about that. The concept of 'majority' is a democratic concept. The settlers' authority stems not from that, but from Halacha [Jewish religious law]. The entire Land of Israel is sacred and so on and so forth.... We are not fellow member of the same people. We are two peoples, despite the reciprocal responsibility that was forced upon us against our will. We, that public defined earlier, foot the bill for the activities of the minority working against us, sacrifice our sons to protect them, keep any chance for peace out of reach because of their settlement in Arab population centers, but they don't even appreciate that. For some of them, we are like the Nazi regime, and have come to expel them from their homes. And we are financing even that sick campaign, and we reconcile ourselves even to that -- because in our democracy, freedom of speech is a supreme value. And they look at us, and they know precisely where our weak spots are, and they exploit it for their own gain. And everything, of course, is in the name of God and the Torah."

IV. "Not a Refusal to Serve -- But a Rupture"

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz (December 23): "The phenomenon of refusal [to serve military orders] was not created by the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza [i.e. the territories]; on the contrary, it opposed it with all its might. The one responsible for it more than anyone else is none other than the Prime Minister. He decided to uproot the Gaza settlements, and is forcing the army, even at the cost of a possible rupture in its ranks, to carry out his decision by force. It is toward him, as well as toward the Defense Minister who also -- mirabile dictu -- made a complete about-face, that the Chief of Staff should direct his accusations. An army -- certainly the IDF -- cannot prevail over tens of thousands of its own people by force. If the settlers decide to respond like the citizenry of the Ukraine -- if they come in large force for a long-term, nonviolent struggle -- no government can prevail over them. Ukraine has proved that it is enough for a few thousand determined and persistent demonstrators, who are undeterred by threats and provocations, to effect a profound change."

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Veteran op-ed writer and the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assistant Eytan Haber opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "What the Americans are trying to do is to twist the arms of mighty China and little Israel. The problem is that from Israel's point of view it is always worthwhile to let the neighborhood bully win."

Block Quotes:

"The Neighborhood Bully"

Veteran op-ed writer and the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assistant Eytan Haber opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 23): "The latest reports that the U.S. has warned Israel not to send back to China spare parts for attack drones that Beijing purchased in the past ought to worry and perhaps shock Israelis. But perhaps not.... The Americans feel that they own the world and certainly the State of Israel, and their word is law.... From their point of view, the Israelis and

the Chinese can both go jump in the lake.... Israel has promised not to harm the vital security interests of the United States and is honoring that promise. But the Pentagon officials don't care. They intend to show us who is boss. The neighborhood bully has taken to the streets and all the children are running for cover. In the Pentagon today there is a group that is in distress. They are Jews, they are senior and they are accused of pushing the United States into the superfluous and muddled war in Iraq in order to help Israel. This group is trying to get rid of its Israeli taint and it trying to pin the blame on Israel. Anyone with eyes in his head knows how dependant Israel is on the United States for everything -- in defense, in world politics and for its economy. In Israel today only the air is free (and it is polluted enough). Over everything else, for better or worse, America is in control. What the Americans are trying to do is to twist the arms of mighty China and little Israel. The problem is that from Israel's point of view it is always worthwhile to let the neighborhood bully win."

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